Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Performance Report



RAISE THE BAR
LEAD THE WORLD

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In March 2020, COVID-19 raced across the United States, shuttering businesses and schools and stretching health care to the brink. Researchers and scientists had yet to develop vaccines,[1] effective testing and treatment were scarce,[2] and Americans were dying from the virus at an alarming rate.[3]

While caring for their own families, educators and school leaders worked tirelessly to stand up learning platforms using whatever resources were available, from hard copy texts to technology platforms not designed for instructional continuity in an unrelenting public health crisis. The transition to remote learning laid bare existing inequalities, including in urban communities where many students lacked reliable home internet and in rural school districts with threadbare connectivity.[4] As one rural superintendent noted:

"Lack of connectivity affected pockets of the community – lack of cell service and high-speed internet. We have teachers who do not have good internet and cell [service]. Teachers and families used internet in their cars at school parking lots, gas stations, and at fire houses."[5]

Even with the heroic efforts of educators and school staff, the limitations of virtual and hybrid learning were evident.[6] Teachers were asked to deliver instruction without the necessary training and support, families struggled to juggle the demands of remote learning with full-time work and the need to care for ailing relatives, and students became disengaged in the absence of social interactions with peers and educators.[7]

During the first year of the pandemic, Cristina Alvizo attended Middle College High School remotely from the three-bedroom, one bathroom home she shares with 10 family members. When asked to describe her experience as a student during the pandemic, she said:

"*Being at home and not in person made it more difficult to manage my schoolwork and my personal life, which brought a lot of stress and anxiety. Having someone guide me is the way I learn best.*"[8]

Students with additional learning and access needs, including students with disabilities and English learners, faced particular challenges during virtual learning, furthering educational inequities.[9,10] Researchers found that students from low-income backgrounds and students of color suffered the largest levels of academic loss during the pandemic.[11]

In the absence of a national strategy to combat a national crisis at the beginning of the pandemic, students, schools, and families continued to struggle through the end of the 2019-20 school year (SY) and into the next. By the time the Biden-Harris Administration took office in January 2021, 10 months into the pandemic, fewer than half of America's schools were open for in-person learning;[12] millions of students had yet to return to their schools;[13] and a youth mental health crisis was overwhelming local providers.

President Biden took decisive and immediate action to safely reopen schools and restore stability for America's students and families. This began with the January 2021 issuance of the Administration's Executive Order to support reopening of schools and early childhood education centers in close coordination with public health experts, families, and educators.[14] The President also understood that students would face lifetime consequences in the absence of a swift, comprehensive rescue package to stabilize teacher staffing, expand mental health supports, and deploy safe and effective vaccines. That is why the President worked to secure passage of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act, delivering critical resources to nearly 15,000 school communities across the country. Within months of enactment, nearly 100 percent of America's public schools were open again.[15]

The ARP Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund extended and expanded the K-12 emergency supports under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020[16] and the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act of 2021.[17] The additional funding through ARP was required to address the growing costs of giving students access to programs and supports to address their interrupted learning. As a parent in Guilford County Schools, North Carolina explained:

"Managing four children's remote learning during COVID while working full-time was incredibly challenging… Their return to in-person classes at Guilford County Schools transformed everything. My children thrived academically, rebuilt friendships, and their emotional well-being improved significantly. The return to normal school routines showed me just how essential our schools are, and I gained a profound respect for educators and their dedication during this difficult period."

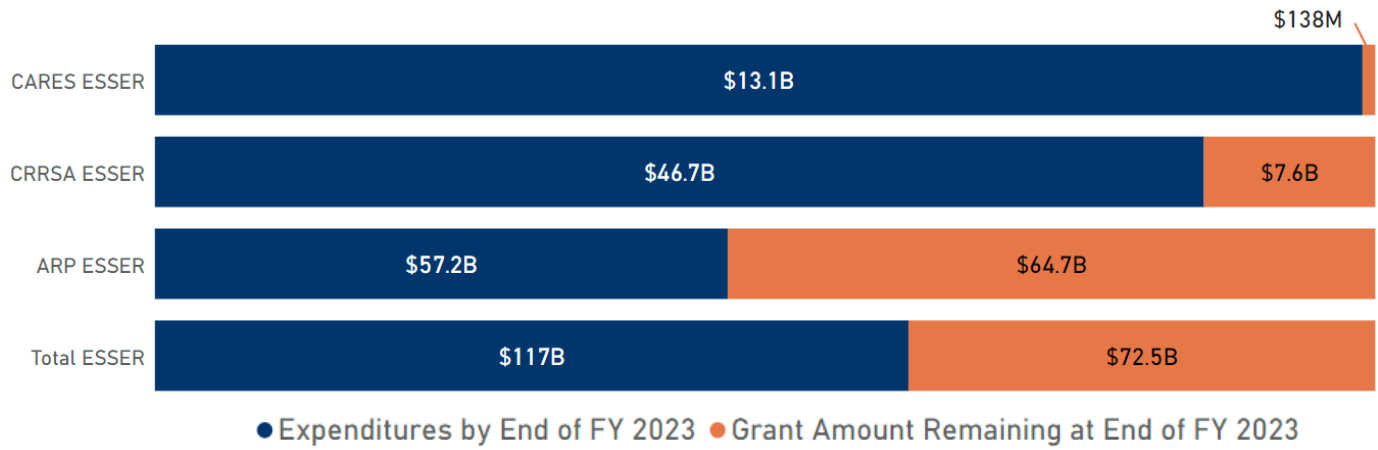
ARP ESSER funding has delivered substantial results—and continues to do so. ARP ESSER provided a runway for local educational agencies (LEAs) to stabilize staffing and hire additional personnel to provide expanded school opportunities, tutoring, and other programs. ARP ESSER funding also made schools safer against the virus's spread, with thousands of communities taking the opportunity to mitigate COVID-19 risks, improve ventilation, create safe outdoor spaces, remediate longstanding environmental hazards, and more.[18] And as states finalize reporting on student learning during the last full school year of ESSER funding, there are increasing signs of academic rebound and improved student attendance.[19] Nationwide, two-thirds of schools are reporting decreasing rates of chronic absenteeism from SY 2021-22 to SY 2022-23; almost every state that has released comparable SY 2023-24 achievement results posted increases in both reading and math since ARP's enactment; and the high school graduation rate of 87 percent has surpassed pre-pandemic levels.[20]

To ensure strong accountability for the historic investment of ESSER funds, the Biden-Harris Administration partnered with state educational agencies (SEAs) and LEAs to annually collect, analyze, and report critical data on the use of relief funds. Specifically, U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona exercised his authority to require annual data collection and reporting of the COVID-19 relief funds to provide the public with an understanding of how states and LEAs are investing these resources, along with emergency funding provided by the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) and the Emergency Assistance to Non-Public Schools (EANS) programs.[22,23] Additionally, the Administration established the Education Stabilization Fund (ESF) Transparency Portal for the purpose of sharing these data more widely with the public.[24]

The data submitted by states, SEAs, and LEAs undergo significant quality checks by U.S. Department of Education (Department) staff while being reported through Annual Performance Reports (APRs) that detail key categories of fund use (e.g., meeting students' academic needs, addressing physical health and safety supporting mental health services); account for numbers of students served; and, beginning with this year's report, show how these investments support individual student groups, including those most impacted by the pandemic. While these data do not necessarily indicate causal inferences between the services and supports provided by COVID-19 relief funds and student outcomes, they provide a critical resource for educational researchers and state and local staff who are conducting such research to help highlight the most effective interventions for learning recovery and student well-being.[25]

This report summarizes the fiscal year (FY) 2023 APR data on ESSER spending that occurred during SY 2022-23.[26] It shows the ESSER spending that followed ESSER's enactment (Figure 1), and how these funds were used to support instructional interventions to help students make academic progress in FY 2023 (Figure 2). Across all FYs (including FY 2023), $117 billion in ESSER funding had been spent by LEAs and reimbursed by states. Furthermore, states and LEAs have developed plans to obligate and draw down remaining funds for specific projects and uses.

Figure 1: Cumulative ESSER Expenditures by the end of FY 2023, by ESSER Fund



Through the end of FY 2023, the following expenditures had occurred, by fund:

- 99% (**$13.1 billion**) of CARES ESSER funds
- 86% (**$46.7 billion**) of CRRSA ESSER funds
- 47% (**$57.2 billion**) of ARP ESSER funds

This report, like the APRs before it, details four categories of fund use: 1) meeting students' academic, social, emotional, and other needs (excluding mental health supports); 2) physical health and safety; 3) mental health; and 4) operational continuity. Within some of these categories, the report provides additional information on key, specific areas of spending such as providing tutoring, [27] offering out-of-school programming, making facility upgrades, stabilizing the educator workforce, and hiring staff to support student mental health. These data include information on spending of ESSER funds across all three COVID-19 relief funds: CARES, CRRSA, and ARP.

Additionally, as noted above, FY 2023 expands earlier reporting parameters to gather information on how COVID-19 relief funds supported programs and services to address impacts on students disproportionately impacted by the pandemic including students of color, English learners, students in foster care, and students with disabilities.

The remainder of this report will focus on spending that occurred during FY 2023. In FY 2023, LEAs expended ESSER funding in the following ways:

Figure 2: FY 2023 LEA Expenditures Across Four Categories

$23 billion expended to meet students' **academic, social, and emotional needs**, such as summer learning programs, tutoring, curriculum, wi-fi, and additional staffing to support students

$14.8 billion expended to **maintain operational continuity**, stabilize staffing and learning conditions

$10 billion expended to address **physical health and safety**, such as building and facilities upgrades, ventilation systems, cleaning supplies, and additional classroom or transportation services to support social distancing

$1.5 billion expended on **mental health supports** for students and staff. Nearly 40% of LEAs that expended funds during FY 2023 reported expending funds on mental health supports provided by licensed professionals, including psychologists and psychotherapists.

In the early days of COVID-19 relief funding, ESSER was critical to helping schools quickly and safely reopen and sustain in-person instruction; however, this was not the only urgent need facing schools during the pandemic. Allowable uses of funds under ESSER aligned with key federal laws so that schools had to follow the same statutory and regulatory requirements as those in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, as amended; the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); and the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (Perkins). These statutory and regulatory requirements grant states and LEAs important flexibility to use federal funding to support innovative education strategies and programs, while also providing guardrails to ensure protections for vulnerable student populations. ESSER dollars could also be used for other specific allowable activities beyond those authorized by the ESEA, IDEA, and Perkins. This structure meant that as ESSER funds wound down, LEAs could use their other federal funds to continue high-impact programs they stood up over the last several years.

A Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on how schools used their ESSER funds[28] found that while still setting 'big goals' on permitted uses, such as academic acceleration, mental health supports, and physical health and well-being, LEAs benefited from ESSER being less restrictive than other federal grants that responded to the pandemic. This flexibility allowed different communities, facing various impacts from the pandemic, to engage with parents, families, educators, and stakeholders to apply the funding in responsive ways. In fact, this engagement required by formal regulations, instituted by the Department, to ensure that communities had a chance to shape and stay abreast of local spending decisions and provide input to ensure that funding was spent to best meet the needs of their community.

While spending decisions were made at the state and local levels, the Department encouraged LEAs to emphasize key priorities and required they engage members of the community, including parents, educators, students, representatives of students with disabilities and others to ensure that funds were spent purposefully and strategically.[29] For example, the Department engaged state grantees and communities across the nation to promote investments in evidence-based interventions through extensive technical assistance offerings, non-regulatory guidance, and regular monitoring of state plans for use of funds. As a result of these opportunities for assistance, several state ARP plans were amended to reflect expanded or additional uses of funds to address the academic impact of COVID-19 and the evolving needs of students. The Department also provided extensive technical assistance to states and LEAs on how American Rescue Plan Homeless Children and Youth funds could meet the urgent needs of families and children experiencing homelessness, including through over a dozen webinars, guidance, and monthly office hours with all states, as well as targeted outreach to individual State chiefs.

LEAs complemented these efforts with their own diverse outreach strategies to include parental voice in shaping ESSER spending plans. In Boston Public Schools, for example, engagement began with roundtable discussions and leaders soliciting public comments on how to best spend ESSER dollars across Boston schools.[30] In Atlanta, extensive community engagement led the district to expand the elementary school day with earlier start and later ending times.[31] And in thousands of communities nationwide, this type of authentic, ongoing and targeted outreach and collaboration between school leaders, educators, and parents helped rebuild trust and restore critical routines to the lives of school children. Partnership with communities and local leaders was a critical step to ensure that ESSER funding was spent thoughtfully.

While states and LEAs had important flexibility to use funds to respond to local conditions, including parent and family voice, the vast majority of LEA spending focused on programs related to academic recovery and student well-being, including summer programming, tutoring, and afterschool programs (Figure 2). And, increasingly, independent studies underscore that wise, community-driven spending decisions have mattered for increasing student learning and closing achievement gaps worsened by the pandemic. Earlier this year, researchers at the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University found the following:

"The federal investment in helping public school students recover from the pandemic's academic fallout paid off. Not only did it lead to increased test score gains, but the investment also significantly reduced the educational inequality generated by the pandemic."[32]

Additionally, more than 40 states have shown year over year increases in reading or mathematics since the height of the pandemic.[33] Crucially, while LEAs were required by law to spend at least 20 percent of their ARP ESSER award on evidence-based interventions to address learning loss, communities proactively reserved more than the required amount to drive academic acceleration and recovery.[34]

Figure 3: Activities to Address Lost Instructional Time During FY 2023

Activity	Percent of LEAs	Number of LEAs
Curriculum adoption and learning materials	32.0%	5,207
Summer learning or summer enrichment	30.3%	4,918
Staffing and activities to respond to the unique needs of students	26.7%	4,347
Additional classroom teachers	22.1%	3,587
Other*	19.8%	3,215
Tutoring	18.6%	3,024
Staffing and activities to support social-emotional well-being	17.4%	2,820
Core staff training and talent pipeline investments	15.6%	2,542
After School programs	14.0%	2,272
Staffing and activities to support mental health needs	13.2%	2,151
Universal screening, academic assessments, and data systems	11.4%	1,854
Extended instructional time	6.6%	1,069
Improved coordination of services for students with multiple needs	3.9%	637
Early childhood programs	3.7%	602

LEAs reported expending $11 billion of ARP ESSER subgrant funds to address the impacts of lost instructional time during FY 2023

"Other" includes all additional activities to address the impact of lost instructional time that do not fit in the defined categories. The activities are not shared here in order to protect identifiable information of districts.

- **78%** of LEAs that were awarded ARP ESSER subgrants reported implementing activities to address lost instructional time using ARP ESSER subgrant funds during FY 2023
- More than **12,000** LEAs implemented at least one activity or intervention to address the impacts of lost instructional time during FY 2023, with the most common uses of funds being curriculum adoption and learning materials (5,207 LEAs) and summer learning or summer enrichment (4,918 LEAs)

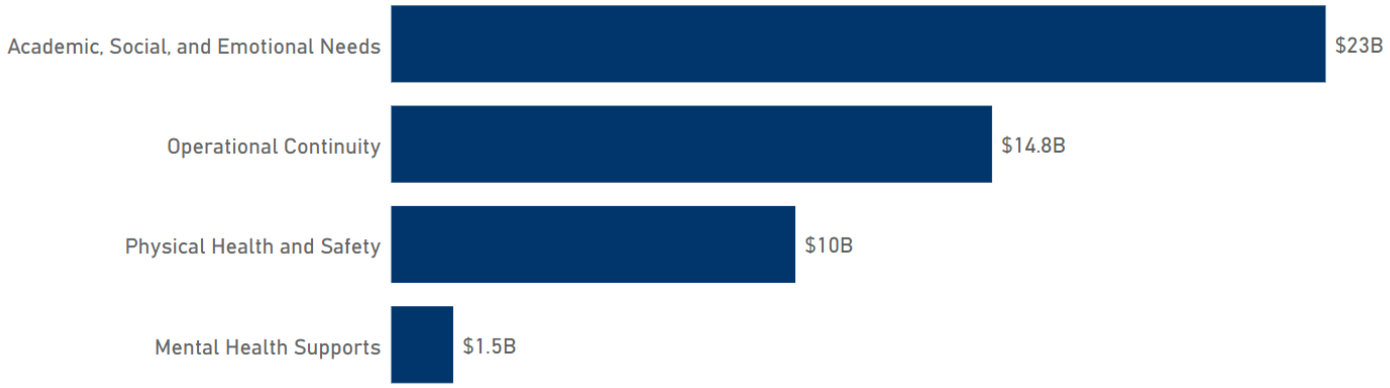
Over the next two years, states and LEAs will gather and report additional data that will help further establish ESSER's contribution to student gains and a stronger future workforce. Researchers already point to how investments are expected to translate into improvements in earnings. External large-scale studies have begun to discuss the impact of ESSER investments on both immediate academic gains and longer-term gains that will last a lifetime.[35] Research by Harvard University's Center for Education Policy Research and Stanford University said the following:

"The academic gains associated with every $1,000 in per student spending would be worth $1,238 in future earnings. Increased academic achievement also comes with valuable social returns, including lower rates of arrest and teen motherhood.[36]

In other words, these funds were not only a tool for improving fairness in recovery; they were a downpayment on our nation's future.

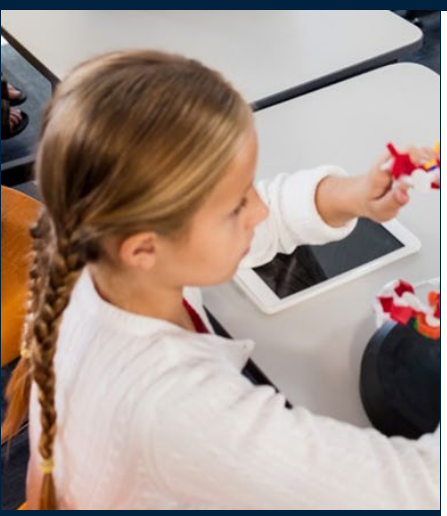
The promise of our nation's future lies in our youth. By investing billions of dollars into strengthening instruction, supporting students' mental health, upgrading technology essential for learning, and bolstering efforts to keep students healthy, the Department and Congress made an intentional and strategic decision to invest in our children and America's future. Our children deserve nothing less.

Figure 4: LEA Subgrant Expenditures During FY 2023, by Category



- During FY 2023, LEAs expended more than **$49.3 billion** in ESSER funds
- 49.8% (**$24.6 billion**) of all LEA subgrant expenditures was spent on **personnel salaries and benefits**
- More than **4,000 LEAs** expended ESSER funds during FY 2023 to provide **home internet access** to students

Strengthening Math and Literacy Skills



The Biden-Harris Administration called on states and communities to take urgent action to address instruction interrupted by the pandemic, especially in math and literacy. The Department provided robust technical assistance to help states and LEAs implement evidence-based practices best suited to help students catch up, from high-dosage tutoring to expanded learning time and high-quality summer programming to making sure they were attending school every day and were engaged in their learning.

Overwhelmingly, states and LEAs used ESSER funds in FY 2023 to act on urgent needs of students. Over the course of FY 2023, states spent $23 billion on meeting students' academic, social, and emotional needs (Figure 2). **Over the course of FY 2023, LEAs spent more than $11 billion in ARP ESSER funding towards activities and interventions to address lost instructional time (Figure 3).**

Research suggests that evidence-based high-dosage tutoring can be an impactful strategy for giving students the individualized support they needed for recovery. Well-designed and well-implemented tutoring programs can significantly accelerate student learning, including enabling a child to gain as much as 1.5 years of achievement in math.[37] **States spent close to $1 billion in FY 2023 on tutoring, across a variety of models**. Across the country, districts allocated funding for about 3 million students to receive tutoring.[38] For example:

- **Guilford County Public Schools in North Carolina** used ESSER funding to serve more than one-fifth of the district's students in a high-dosage tutoring program designed to meet the needs of students who were behind grade-level proficiency. The change in average scores were 0.06 grades and 0.15 grades above the national average in reading and math, respectively, and 0.3 grades and 0.4 grades above average compared to similar districts in North Carolina, in 2023.
- **Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) in Tennessee** used ESSER funding to stand up the Accelerating Scholars high-dosage tutoring program, which reached more than 7,000 students. MNPS also stood up the Promising Schools summer program to provide every student access to summer learning, including classroom instruction, ACT prep, STEM activities and other enrichment opportunities. Following implementation of these programs, MNPS students reached their highest overall proficiency score in history.

Across the country, ESSER fueled **academic-focused afterschool programming and expanded learning time programming**, funding opportunities for as many as 2.5 million students during afterschool programming and providing valuable additional learning opportunities.[39] For example:

- In **St. Vrain Valley Public Schools in Colorado**, the district used ESSER funding to implement extended learning programming three times a week. Participants exceeded pre-pandemic proficiency levels by 2.3 percentage points in both math and reading.
- **Beauford County School District in South Carolina** used ESSER funding to work alongside community-based organizations to implement an extended learning program. In 2024, the district exceeded pre-pandemic proficiency in reading across grades 3–8.

Figure 5: ESSER Funded LEA Activities and Interventions to Address the Impacts of Lost Instructional Time in FY 2023

Summer Learning Programs
- 6,755 LEAs implemented evidence-based summer learning programs
- 4,485,840 students funded*

After-School Programs
- 3,541 LEAs implemented evidence-based after-school programs
- 2,381,841 students funded*

Extended Instructional Time
- 2,133 LEAs implemented extended instructional time

Tutoring
- 3,001 LEAs implemented evidence-based high-dosage tutoring programs
- 3,104,491 students funded*

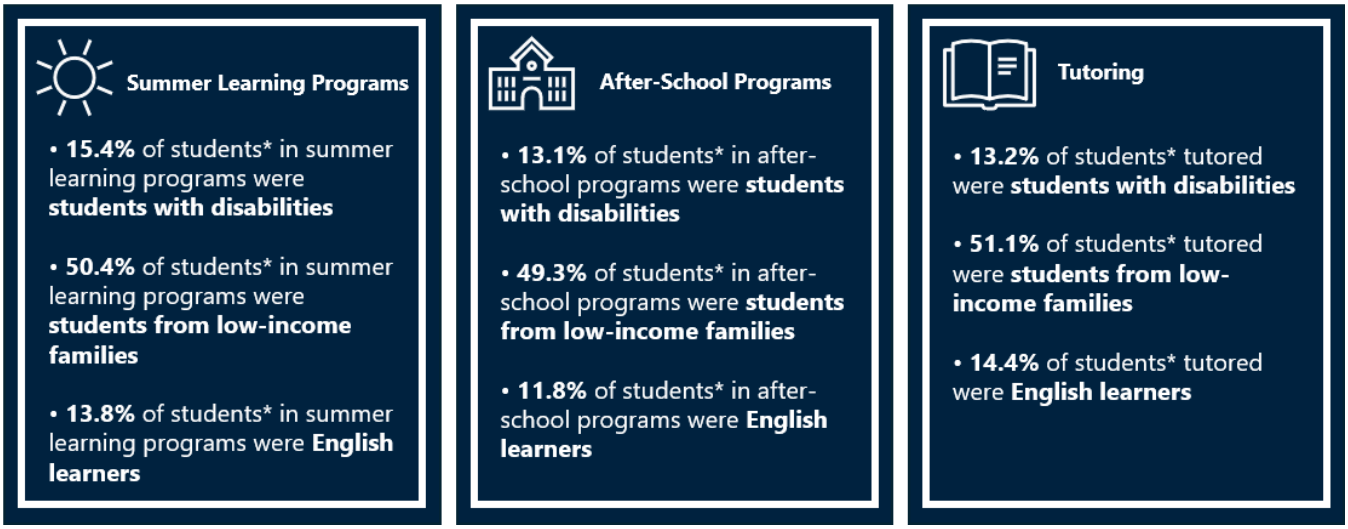
Early Childhood Programs
- 321 LEAs expanded early childhood education programs
- 514 LEAs enhanced early childhood education programs

Full-Service Community Schools
- 237 LEAs supported new or current full-service community schools

Educational Technology
- 8,363 LEAs purchased educational technology for students

**Students funded* reflects the number of program placements that were filled during the reporting period. For example, one student may have attended two different summer programs offered by an LEA and would be included twice in these counts. LEAs with data quality issues have been removed from these student count totals.*

Figure 6: ESSER Funded LEA Summer Learning, After School, and Tutoring Programs in FY 2023



The total number of student placements in evidence-based summer learning programs in FY 2023: *n* = 4,485,840

The total number of student placements in evidence-based after-school programs in FY 2023: *n* = 2,381,841

The total number of student placements in evidence-based high-dosage tutoring programs in FY 2023: *n* = 3,104,491

**Student placements* reflect the number of program placements that were filled during the reporting period. For example, one student may have attended two different summer programs offered by an LEA and would be included twice in these counts. LEAs with data quality issues have been removed from these student count totals.

One of the most profound impacts the pandemic had on our nation's schools was a sharp increase in student absenteeism.[40] Students faced significant barriers in the pandemic context, ranging from disengagement, lack of access to student and family supports, and student and family health challenges.[41] More than ever, schools needed resources to hire personnel, build stronger partnerships with families, and implement urgent interventions to reengage students. ESSER funds allowed states and LEAs to leverage urgent interventions to reengage students and families. In FY 2022, more than 80% of LEAs implemented at least one strategy to reengage students and increase attendance.[42] These efforts were maintained in FY 2023, with similar shares of LEAs taking action to reengage students through direct outreach to families (70%), implementing new curricular strategies (62%), credit recovery and/or acceleration strategies (54%), partnering with community-based organizations (39%) and other strategies (8%) (Figure 7).

More than **12,000** LEAs reported that they implemented at least one strategy to reengage students with poor attendance or participation

Figure 7: Strategies LEAs Employed to Reengage Students with Poor Attendance in FY 2023

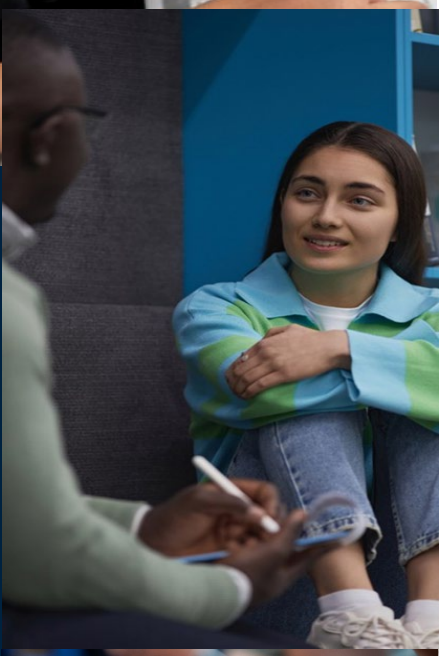
Method	Number of LEAs	Percent of LEAs
Other strategies	1,232	7.6%
Partnering with community-based organizations	6,248	38.6%
Offering home internet service and/or devices	7,263	44.9%
Engaging the school district homeless liaison	7,715	47.7%
Offering credit recovery and/or acceleration strategies	8,660	53.5%
Implementing new curricular strategies to improve student engagement	10,007	61.8%
Direct outreach to families	11,333	70.0%

ESSER investments helped enable states and LEAs to dramatically expand their work to reengage students, through strategies that required personnel, data infrastructure, or other supports. In the absence of these funds, schools may not have had the resources or capacity to stand up necessary programs, including stronger outreach to families and home visits. For example:

- **Santa Fe Public Schools in New Mexico** used ESSER funding to offer tutoring across elementary, middle, and high schools before and after school to provide students with tutoring and mentorship opportunities in collaborations with community-based organizations. In 2024, the district exceeded the state average in reading for the first time, with several schools showing double digit percent growth. In addition, chronic absenteeism decreased by 20 percentage points from SY 2023-24 to SY 2024-25.

- **Virginia** faced a chronic absenteeism rate of 19% in SY 2022-23 but experienced a 16% drop in chronic absenteeism after launching the ESSER-funded "All in VA" initiative, which included an all-hands-on-deck attendance matters campaign, expanding high-dosage tutoring, offering extended school time, strengthening transportation, and "nudges" to parents through text messages, phone calls, and other alerts when a student neared chronic absence.

- **Johnstown Public Schools, New York,** a rural district, had an average chronic absenteeism rate of 36% in high schools in SY 2021-22. The district used ESSER funding to launch an evidence-based mentorship program, provide individualized supports to students, and create success plans, with a focus on everyday attendance. After a full year of implementation of the mentoring program, the district saw a decrease in the absenteeism rate in one school by 16% and another by 36%.



When young people have access to mental health care and well-being supports they need and deserve, they are more likely to engage, learn, develop, achieve, and build important connections with peers and caring adults.[43] Despite the growing need for youth mental health services, families often face significant hurdles when trying to acquire these sometimes life-saving services: children and families living in poverty are least likely to be connected with high-quality mental health services[44] and 42% of families report cost and insurance as a barrier to mental health care.[45] Schools are uniquely positioned to deliver essential mental health services to youth; students are six times more likely to receive mental health services when they are delivered at school.[46] By providing mental health care within the school environment, a greater number of students can be reached through education, prevention, and early intervention.

ESSER investments increased capacity for schools to tackle the youth mental health crisis head on.[46] The Chief Executive Officer of Cleveland Metropolitan School District said the following:

"Mental health was top of mind for our families and also top of mind for our students. And so, you would see that we invested a lot in wraparound services. We partnered with the Mayor's office to bring in out-of-school time where there was almost $15 million that we invested into partnering with community partners to provide out-of-school time for services for students so that when students are actually leaving school, there is a place for them to go."

Helping students to succeed academically includes addressing their mental health needs. Districts across the nation made the choice to expand investments in mental health, showcasing that academic recovery includes ensuring that all students are supported with adequate emotional and mental health supports to thrive in school. ESSER funding was crucial to connecting students to peers, caring adults, and clinical services to be able to meet unprecedented student need in schools and districts across the nation, regardless of geography or size. These investments highlight the importance of including student and parent voice in conversations, listening to our students' needs, and acting to support their overall well-being.

Noting the immense need for increased access to mental health services for students, over 6,000 LEAs (nearly 40%) expended funds on mental health supports for students provided by licensed professionals including psychologists and psychotherapists. For example:

- In **North East Independent School District in Texas**, schools used ESSER funding to establish mental health resource officers across the district. These mental health resource officers worked with mental health counselors on each middle and high school campus to connect students and families to mental health and other healthcare services offered by the district and the community.

- **The South Carolina Public Charter School District** used ESSER funding to hire 15 mental health and student support staff. Hired staff worked with guidance counselors and school administrators to identify students struggling emotionally and academically as the transition out of virtual learning was made. With ESSER funding, every school in the district has delivered more counseling services to students than pre-pandemic levels.

- **The School Mental Health Initiative in Nebraska,** funded through nearly $15 million in ESSER dollars, supported training staff in addressing students' mental health needs. More than 400 educators representing 70 schools or districts were trained by July 2022. Follow-up surveys showed a statistically significant increase in knowledge and understanding of how to support students' mental health needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic devastated local public school jobs, resulting in the loss of 9% of local public education employment—including teachers, specialized instructional support personnel, and other critical staff—over the course of three months in 2020.[48] When President Biden took office, states, local communities, and LEAs faced significant budget challenges to manage this loss. President Biden moved swiftly to surge $130 billion to schools through ARP, providing communities with the fiscal certainty they needed to both retain and hire new staff, using ARP funds and their own local budget dollars.

In FY 2023, nearly half of the ESSER funds expended by LEAs, totaling over $24 billion, supported salaries and benefits for educators and other LEA personnel. Thanks in part to these investments, there are now more people working in America's schools than at any time in the last decade. As of October 2024, local public schools have added 643,000 jobs since 2021, including 43% more social workers and 23% more nurses working in America's schools to meet the needs of all students.[49]

Adequate staffing is foundational to in-person learning and academic acceleration. A superintendent in Seattle stated that ESSER funds allowed teachers to focus on what they do best: teach. The Superintendent continued with the following:

"There wasn't a playbook, but we built one... on what it takes to leverage an influx of dollars with a key critical mission that you were able to actually put into practice in a way that is more systemic. We know that some of the dollars do run out, but you've built something sustainable that's actually because you've invested in your people with professional development, with community partners, with teacher and parents. When you invest in people, that is a long-term investment."

ESSER funding allowed schools to invest in educators and other school staff with targeted funding to support professional development, trainings, literacy and math initiatives, and more. For example:

- **North Carolina** used a portion of ESSER funds to train more than 44,000 educators on evidence-based reading instruction, reaching nearly 750,000 pre-K through 5th grade students. Through this investment, North Carolina reduced the number of students requiring intensive literacy intervention at each grade level and students also outpaced national growth in reading during SY 2022-23. Recognizing the positive outcomes of this investment, North Carolina policymakers have committed additional state funding to sustain these successful literacy initiatives beyond the ESSER funding period.

- **Indiana** invested approximately $26 million from ESSER to educator training in evidence-based literacy instruction. Indiana also partnered with private sector investors to further support Indiana's educator preparation programs in training pre-service teachers in the science of reading methods.

- **Warner School District in Oklahoma** used ARP funds to add an additional teacher at every grade level to make up for lost learning during time COVID. This reduced class sizes to 15 to 17 during SY 2022-23 from 22 to 24 students per class during SY 2019-20. The benefit has been seen across the board in educational and behavioral outcomes of students.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated what has long been known – that the poor physical state of many schools has real impacts on student health and learning outcomes. The average age of a public school in the United States is 49 years old, with almost 40% of these facilities built before 1970.[50] Schools nationwide have long grappled with aging infrastructure and outdated facilities, in need of renovations but often without local funding to address failing infrastructure. Nearly one-third of public schools use non-permanent or portable buildings on campus to teach students. As such, many public schools were in dire need of addressing outdated heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems or making other modifications to address safe flow of air into school spaces.

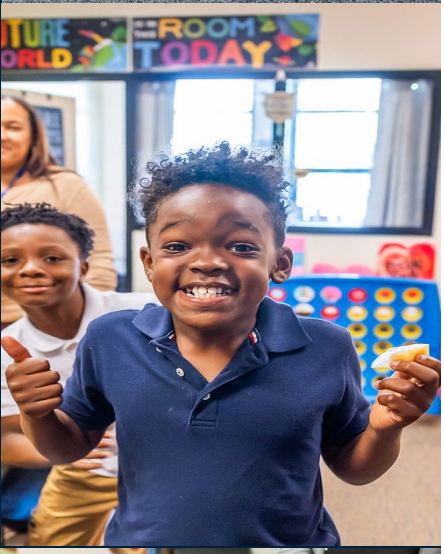
When faced with the herculean task of reopening all schools for safe in-person instruction during a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic, many LEAs chose to spend ESSER funding on school infrastructure and other capital investments to help ensure that students and staff could remain healthy and safe during in-person instruction. In FY 2023, LEAs used more than $6 billion in ESSER funding to pay for building and facilities upgrades and maintenance.

For states with historically low educational spending, the one-time infusion of federal funds presented a unique opportunity for districts to not only address COVID-19 concerns but also tackle long-standing infrastructure needs that affect students' ability to learn in a safe environment. For example:

- **Neshoba County School District in Mississippi** spent a significant amount of their ESSER funding on improving space for in-person learning. They undertook a renovation project to install new HVAC units, renovate bathrooms, replace windows and exterior doors in multiple buildings, and even add some classrooms.
- **Shelby County in Tennessee** used ESSER funding to install new water bottle filling stations with filtration systems in all schools. Prior to COVID-19, the district had concerns with lead and other toxic chemicals in school water fountains. ESSER funding helped fix this issue and ensure that students had access to safe and clean water in school.
- In **Ellsworth, Maine,** the superintendent used ESSER funding in this rural community for critical upgrades to HVAC systems in both schools. The district also used money for Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) upgrades to better meet the needs of special education students, including putting in an ADA-compliant bathroom, stage lift, and a van with a ramp.

More than **6,000** LEAs reported that they spent ESSER funds on ventilation during FY 2023

More than **11,000** LEAs reported that they implemented at least one method to maintain safe in person instruction during FY 2023



The Biden-Harris Administration's investment in public education through the ESSER program was unprecedented. The urgent circumstances in which schools, LEAs, and states had to utilize the funding was also unique for our nation's education system. While it is too early to know the full impact of ESSER investments on academic outcomes, student mental health, school infrastructure, and our educator workforce, evidence is mounting that these funds led to early success and makes clear that robust public investment matters in education.

ESSER was a lifeline. A wide breadth of research supports that ESSER was a necessary lifeline for schools and builds on school finance research that, for decades, has stated that funding levels impact student achievement (e.g., Jackson & Mackevicius, 2024). Research by Dewey, et al. found:

"*Our results suggest the spending did have a positive impact on achievement. Indeed, the estimated impact is in line with the prior research on the effect of increased education spending.*"[52]

Every $1,000 in additional spending per student was associated with an increase in math and reading improvement[53], demonstrating the clear return on investment from ESSER funds. Additionally, since ESSER funds were allocated according to LEAs' relative share of ESEA Title I, Part A funding, which provides financial assistance to LEAs and schools with high numbers or percentages of children from low-income backgrounds, the funds not only helped narrow historic gaps in achievement, but also helped reduce achievement gaps that widened during the pandemic in a number of states and districts.[54]

While the ESSER investment – bold and historic in nature – does not come close to making up for decades of underfunding in our education system, it allowed the American education system to safely reopen, address critical student needs, and kickstart academic recovery.

Its flexibility and design, including alignment with other education funding, delivered a positive return on investment for this one-time funding.[55] ESSER's alignment with ESEA's Title I, Part A funding formula meant that LEAs could gradually pivot to Title I funding as ESSER funds sunset. Along the way, the Department provided individualized support to states, helping them to determine the impact of their investments and whether they were worth sustaining. The Department did this through dedicated technical assistance, guidance documents, and convening state leaders to learn from each other. Examples of states and LEAs sustaining practices include:

- **Jefferson County Public Schools in Colorado** is spending $9 million to continue the work started with ESSER funds after seeing positive results, including training for paraprofessionals, mental health telehealth appointments for students, a new curriculum, and other staffing supports.
- **Denver Public Schools in Colorado** is investing $7 million to continue afterschool and summer programs originally funded by ESSER, including funding for mental health workers in those programs.

Along the way, the Biden-Harris Administration fought for historic investments that would help states continue pandemic recovery. Over the last four years, this Administration secured a nearly $2 billion increase in Title I funding; a $1.5 billion increase in IDEA funding; $2 billion in Bipartisan Safer Communities Act funds targeted to high-need LEAs to address the mental health crisis and improve school climate and safety; and a five-fold increase in funding for Full-Service Community Schools. The Department's budget requests continued to ask for strong investments in students and communities, to help school districts and schools sustain investments made through ARP ESSER. At this crucial moment for our nation's students, families, and communities, we should continue to make investments that will "Raise the Bar"[56] on achievement, completion, and outcomes.

Data and transparency helped drive recovery. States that had data on whether their initiatives were having the desired impact on schools were able to make pivots in program implementation and more easily decide what programs to sustain. For example, in response to a decade of decline in National Assessment of Education Progress literacy scores, which were further impacted by the pandemic, Indiana launched the Indiana Literacy Cadre to better train educators in evidence-based literacy practices. The schools that participated in the Cadre improved by 2.5% while schools that did not participate did not demonstrate improvement.[55] In response to this return-on-investment, Indiana doubled down on the Cadre program, expanding the program from 44 schools in the 2022 school year to 500 schools in the 2024 school year. Indiana also launched a competitive grant program for districts to design reading programs. Federal technical assistance centers that can support states in program evaluations and effectiveness will help make future funding even more impactful.

Additionally, we saw many states develop interactive data dashboards that allow educators, parents, communities, community-based organizations, and non-profits to see data in real-time and make well-informed decisions about the success or failure of particular investments in educational programs and initiatives. Several states set up data dashboards that showed ESSER drawdown data at the state and local levels. Other states and LEAs stood up partnerships with research groups to evaluate and publish the impact of initiatives. Connecticut used ESSER funding to develop the Center for Connecticut Education Research Collaboration (CCERC) a research partnership between state education leaders and state colleges and universities to collect stories about programs and conduct high-quality analysis of different programs and initiatives so they can say with confidence what is working, including the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP), which launched in 2021 to combat chronic absenteeism. CCERC, through their quick analysis, was able to find that for most students examined, attendance rates increased by 4 percentage points in the month immediately following the first LEAP visit. The LEAP report was released by CCERC publicly, which showcased the state's commitment to data and transparency.[57,58]

While the ARP statute required ESSER funds to be obligated by September 30, 2024, states and their subgrantees remain hard at work in maximizing the impact of these critical resources. As of January 13, 2025, 47 states have sought and received Department approval to finalize expenditures for projects that were underway by statutory deadlines but that can carry benefits for students, educators, and families up until early 2026. These requests, commonly referred to as "liquidation extension," involve roughly 1,000 LEAs nationwide, with particular benefits accruing to rural school districts that faced supply chain disruptions during the course of the program period. LEAs approved for liquidation extension can finalize critical facility repairs, deploy mental health services, and continue before and afterschool tutoring services to further academic recovery and improve learning and teaching conditions for already obligated contracts. Furthermore, these extensions help ensure the responsible use of the taxpayers' significant investment in educational recovery.

Not only did the ESSER investment matter – setting up states and LEAs to sustain ESSER funded efforts mattered as well. One of the most significant steps Congress and the Administration took to protect schools from abrupt budget shortfalls was through Maintenance of Effort and Maintenance of Equity provisions. These provisions were created based on lessons learned from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, in which states and LEAs experienced significant shortfalls when relief funding expired.

In exchange for ESSER (and other COVID-relief funds), states agreed to maintain education spending compared to prior years (maintenance of effort). Additionally, states agreed to not disproportionately reduce per-pupil spending for students in high-need LEAs and to not decrease state funding for the highest poverty LEAs (maintenance of equity).[59] Following extensive engagement from the Department with state leaders, all states have satisfied maintenance of effort, and virtually all have met maintenance of equity requirements.

These fiscal effort requirements[60] have been vital for ensuring that state education investments are commensurate with the continued work of academic recovery, and to guard against the type of fiscal cliff that LEAs and communities experienced following the Great Recession.[61] Maintenance of equity, in particular, has conferred particular benefits for rural school districts that struggle to absorb education spending reductions across a small student enrollment base. Under the Department's implementation of maintenance of equity, 25 states have made more than $902 million in supplemental payments to nearly 900 high-need LEAs.

The largest ever one-time investment in public and non-public schools appropriately comes with important requirements for states and LEAs to report on the uses of these funds.[60] This reporting is vital for public transparency; for shining additional sunlight that can support states and LEAs in preventing waste, fraud, and abuse; and for enabling rigorous evaluation of how different spending choices advanced academic recovery and student well-being—including the data presented in the Year 4 report.

Naturally, these important data lag; school staff delivered activities and administered funds during SY 2022–23 and reported on them in the next school year. Likewise, activities and investments made during SY 2023–24, which will comprise the Year 5 report, are being reported this year. And, next year, states and schools will report on uses of funds during the SY 2024–25 that is currently underway.

The Department appreciates the extraordinary work that states and LEAs have done to build reporting systems to provide data on uses of funds, to assure their accuracy, and to leverage these and other sources of data to inform plans for continued recovery. Seeing the positive return on investment from ESSER funding, we hope that states will continue to sustain these crucial investments to fuel continued academic recovery and mental health supports. The federal government laid the foundation to help students recover and to help schools reopen strong; the Department is proud of the work that educators, families, students, and communities have done to get students back on track.

The Department urges states to pick up the baton and to offer more robust funding support to districts to continue investments in public schools. States should continue to invest in initiatives to increase student achievement and reduce other inequitable education outcomes as well as support students with mental health resources. The Biden-Harris Administration proposed increases for ESEA Title I, Part A and other K-12 spending programs in FY 2025, as well as $8 billion in new funds for states to spend on academic recovery to help states continue to meet every student's needs.[62]

For more information, including reporting parameters and prior year reports, please visit the Department's Education Stabilization Fund (ESF) Transparency Portal.

DISCLAIMER

This document contains resources that are provided for the audience's convenience. The inclusion of these materials is not intended to reflect its importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered. These materials may contain the views and recommendations of various subject matter experts as well as hypertext links, contact addresses, and websites to information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. The opinions expressed in any of these materials do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. The U.S. Department of Education does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of any outside information included in these materials.

ESSER Reporting Timeline

Program Year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Reporting period	Mar 2020 – Oct 2020	Oct 2020 – end of State FY 2021	State FY 2022	State FY 2023	State FY 2024	State FY 2025
School year (SY)	SY 2019-20 (partial)	SY 2020-21	SY 2021-22	SY 2022-23	SY 2023-24	SY 2024-25
Collection period	Winter 2021	Spring 2022	Spring 2023	Spring 2024	Spring 2025	Spring 2026
Data publicly available	Published June 2021	Published Dec 2022	Published June 2024	Spring 2025 (est.)	Spring 2026 (est.)	Spring 2027 (est.)
CARES ESSER	1st annual report	2nd annual report	3rd annual report	4th annual report	N/A	N/A
CRRSA ESSER	N/A	1st annual report	2nd annual report	3rd annual report	4th annual report	N/A
ARP ESSER	N/A	1st annual report	2nd annual report	3rd annual report	4th annual report	5th annual report

Note: There is approximately a two-year span between when activities occur and when their resulting data are publicly available. The blue highlighted cells correspond to the years (starting in FY 2023) when more granular data will be collected and reported.

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